



HELP

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HELPPFILE

Computer incredibly slow when first turned on

Q I have a problem with my Dell Inspiron 2650, which I bought second-hand. There is nothing on the system except for Windows XP Media Center Edition, which is an odd choice for a notebook with hardly any multimedia abilities, but this was on the computer when I bought it. The trouble is that the computer is incredibly slow for several minutes each time it is turned on. It eventually returns to normal, only to repeat the problem each time that I switch it back on.

I pressed Ctrl-Alt-Delete to find out the processor usage, which is shown at 100 per cent. It seems that something called Svchost.exe is using 98 per cent of processor time. I looked down the list and there are several processes with the same name, each using very different amounts of memory. Is this a virus?

Steve Beers, via email

A This is not a virus, although some people might classify it as spyware, even though it is something that Microsoft put on your system. Task Manager, which is the window that appears when you press Ctrl-Alt-Delete, is not very helpful in explaining what processes are, so it is easy to confuse a legitimate file with a virus or spyware. Svchost, which is short for Service Host, is a small .exe file that is part of the operating system and is used to load services or groups of services. Each group of services loads as a separate process, hence the multiple mentions of Svchost.exe in your processes list.

To find out what is going on, you need to know which services are causing that high processor utilisation. Task Manager does not tell you this, but if you go to www.sysinternals.com (which is now part of Microsoft) you'll find a neat program called Process Explorer. Download the compressed archive and extract the contents to a folder in the Program Files folder. Then create a short cut for Procexp.exe on your desktop. Launch this while the processor use is high and be patient. When the Process Explorer window eventually appears, look down the processor column to see which process is using all the processor time.

Unlike Task Manager, Process Explorer shows you which modules each instance of Service Host is running. You should find the problem is caused by Wuaucnt.exe, which is the Windows Automatic Updates service.

Ever since October 2006, and only on certain computers but inexplicably not others, Windows Update seems to use up incredible amounts of processor time. We don't know what it is doing; it is not downloading or installing updates, but just seems to be checking which updates are already installed. Since April 2007, the problem has got much worse. We keep on waiting for Microsoft to come out with a patch, but so far it has not produced a fix that works for everyone.

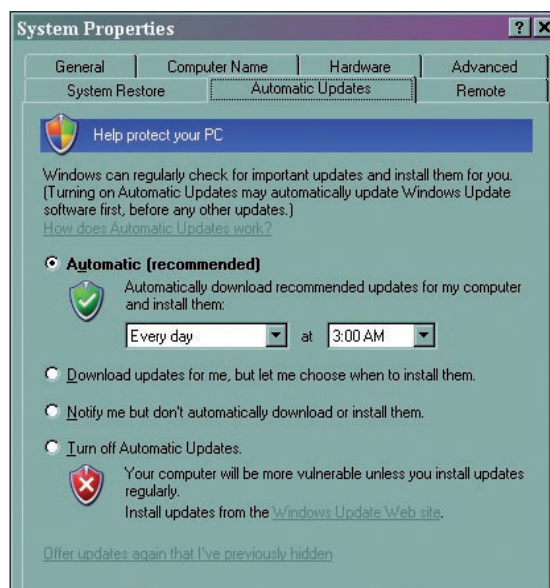
In some cases, it seems to be caused by a corrupted Software Distribution folder, in which Windows records details of updates. In cases where Microsoft Update is installed (which also updates Microsoft Office), the problem is related to a bug in the Msi.dll file. In other cases, the problem appears to relate to a folder called Catroot2.

To fix machines that are having this problem, run Services.msc and stop the Automatic Update service. Then go to <http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=43264> and download a patch for Windows Update, but don't run it yet. The file is called WindowsUpdateAgent20-x86.exe. Rename C:\windows\software distribution as C:\windows\software distributionXXX, then rename C:\windows\windowsupdate.log to WindowsupdateXXX.log. Finally, run the downloaded file and restart the computer.

If that doesn't help, the problem may be in the Windows Installer service, described at <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/916089>. Download the updated version of Msi.dll to which this links. In other cases, the problem can be cured by deleting the contents of the C:\Windows\System32\CatRoot2 folder. Don't delete the folder, though – just its contents.

Microsoft has admitted that all its patches so far have failed to cure the problem for everyone. If Automatic Updates is still causing excessive delays after all these fixes, you could just disable Automatic Updates and remember to check for updates manually every week. Hopefully one of these updates will eventually cure the problem. You can test Automatic Updates to see if the problem is fixed by clicking on Start, then Run and typing wuauclt /rundetect.

We would like to hear from anyone who has had a similar experience, particularly if they have any further suggestions that might help.



▲ Automatic Updates can cause slow-downs after boot-up

What's wrong with my mouse?

Q I have a computer running Windows Me. For the last four months, after I have been using my computer for an hour or so, the mouse becomes difficult to control, lagging behind when I try to move it across the screen. I then have to restart the PC for everything to be OK again. I have tried several troubleshooting programs without success.

Richard Clayton, richard.clayton1@ntlworld.com

A When the mouse becomes slow to respond, it usually means some process is using far too much processor time, or there is a memory management issue. In addition, Windows XP users have been suffering from a similar problem caused by Automatic Updates (see opposite). While Windows Me's automatic update is a little different from that used with Windows XP and we haven't heard any complaints, it is possible that you too are suffering from this problem.

The memory management of Windows 95, 98 and Me can cause things to get very slow after many programs have been run. Programs do not necessarily release memory blocks when they have finished with them. With these versions of Windows, a particular problem is a special area of memory called System Resources, which is used by the operating system to manage applications. It is limited in size and often runs out of space, causing the system to slow down and, ultimately, crash. We would suggest temporarily turning off the Windows Automatic Update service. Do this by opening Control Panel and clicking on the Automatic Updates icon.

If that doesn't cure it, two useful utilities that come with Windows Me may be able to determine the problem. These are called Resource Meter and System Monitor, and they are optional components, so they may or may not be installed on your system already. To check, click on Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools. If you don't see them, go to Control Panel, Add/Remove Programs, then click the Windows

Setup tab. Choose System Tools and click the Details button. Then you can add these two tools.

Resource Meter is a small gauge that appears in the System Tray and displays the percentage of system resources still available. As these drop, it changes from green, to orange, and then red. This is a sign that you need to close some applications or reboot your system, because many applications don't return resources even when they are closed.

System Monitor displays a graph showing processor usage and, optionally, other system measurements such as memory in use. It still doesn't tell you which program is using the processor time, so we recommend you download a program called Process Explorer. See opposite for details of how to install and run this.

Process Explorer shows far more information than you'll need to know, as you can see below. Importantly, it lists all running processes with a description of each, and the processor time each uses. When you minimise the program, it shows an icon in the System Tray that gives current processor usage and the name of the process with the highest processor use.

Hopefully this will help you track down the problem, or at least provide sufficient information for an expert to be able to diagnose it.

Process	PID	CPU	Description	Company Name
Idle	0x0	86	System Idle Process	
Kernel32.DLL	0x0...	1	Win32 Kernel core component	Microsoft Corporation
MSGSRV32.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Windows 32-bit VxD Messag...	Microsoft Corporation
mmtask.tsk	0x0...	0x0...	Multimedia background task...	Microsoft Corporation
MPREX.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	WIN32 Network Interface Se...	Microsoft Corporation
PL_SERVER.EXE	0x0...	0x0...		
VSMON.EXE	0x0...	2	TrueVector Service	Zone Labs, LLC
DKSERVICE.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	DKSERVICE.EXE	Executive Software I...
MSTASK.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Task Scheduler Engine	Microsoft Corporation
KB891711.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Windows KB891711 compon...	Microsoft Corporation
EXPLORER.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Windows Explorer	Microsoft Corporation
EXPLORE.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Internet Explorer	Microsoft Corporation
WINZIP32.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	WinZip Executable	WinZip Computing, I...
PSTORES.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Protected storage server	Microsoft Corporation
DDHELP.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Microsoft DirectX Helper	Microsoft Corporation
WINPATROL.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	WinPatrol System Monitor	BlIP Studios
FILEBACK.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	FileBack PC	Maximum Output Sof...
AVGEMC.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	AVG E-Mail Scanner	GRISOFT, s.r.o.
TASKMON.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Task Monitor	Microsoft Corporation
SYSTRAY.APPLE	0x0...	0x0...	System Tray Applet	Microsoft Corporation
AVGCC.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	AVG Control Center	GRISOFT, s.r.o.
AVGAMSVR.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	AVG Alert Manager	GRISOFT, s.r.o.
ZLCUENT.EXE	0x0...	3	Zone Labs Client	Zone Labs, LLC
TARDIS.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	TARDIS 2000 Application	H.C.Mingham-Smith ...
RSRCMTR.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	Resource Meter	Microsoft Corporation
DYNDNS.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	DYNDNS Updater	Kana Solution
ADSGONE.EXE	0x0...	1	Popup Killer Spyware blocke...	A1Tech, Inc.
PROCEXP.EXE	0x0...	4	Sysinternals Process Explorer	Sysinternals
SYSTEMON.EXE	0x0...	0x0...	System Monitor	Microsoft Corporation
PSP.EXE	0x0...	1	Paint Shop Pro 6	Jasc Software, Inc.

▲ Process Explorer tells you all you need to know about the programs running on your PC

Organising All Programs menu

Q As our computer is used by all members of the family, the All Programs screen is becoming quite cluttered and is running out of space. We do try hard to uninstall and remove programs that are not used any more so that we can regain space, but the build-up of programs continues.

I have noticed that there is an option to create program groups before installing new software, but this means uninstalling and reinstalling programs. Will it work? Is there a way to organise the current program icons without losing any of the program's functionality as the program's path will change?

The Aelmans family, aelmans@btinternet.com

A The All Programs list is a folder in the Start Menu or, to be precise, two folders: one for all users and one the current user. The groups are folders underneath it. These folders contain short cuts to the programs, not the programs themselves, so rearranging the Start Menu won't affect the folders in which each program is installed. It is fine to create subfolders under Programs and drag program icons to these folders. You don't need to reinstall applications.

If you right-click on the Start button, you can choose Explore All Users. This will show all applications that have been installed for use by all users of the computer. There may also be a few stored in the Start menu under each user account. To simplify it, create folders and move icons to the appropriate folder.

Your experts

HELPFILE Paul Mullen

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With 27 years of PC experience as a power user, programmer and IT consultant, Paul Mullen answers all PC problems, tackling hardware, system and security issues.



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SOFTWARE HELP Kay Ewbank

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Database developer and productivity expert Kay Ewbank offers help with office applications.



Ben Pitt

Professional musician and keen photographer Ben Pitt gives advice on using creative software.



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BUYING HELP Tom Royal

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Labs Editor Tom Royal recommends the best products for your specific requirements.



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Web access and Favorites problem

Q I am currently experiencing a problem accessing the web and would appreciate some guidance. I can access my homepage without a problem, but when I type a web address into the address bar, either on the same tab in which my homepage is open or on a new tab, nothing happens. However, I can connect if I use the Google Search bar.

I also cannot save sites in my Favorites. If I click the Add to Favorites icon in the Tabs bar, the Add a Favorite box appears and everything seems OK, but the saved address never gets into the Favorites folder, which is empty. If I click on Favorites in the menu bar, there are a few saved addresses in there.

Could these problems be caused by my firewall? I am using Internet Explorer 7 and have Norton Internet Security installed. I've tried to ascertain if there is a setting that would block using the address bar, but I can't see anything that appears to do this. My operating system is Windows XP Professional Edition and I have an Athlon X2 4800 processor with 2GB of memory.

*Tony Woodroffe,
ajwoodroffe@btopenworld.com*

A We have seen this, too. Something on the system is corrupted, possibly due to an attempt by spyware to attach itself to Internet Explorer. We suspect the failure of the address bar to work properly is related to some conflict between the anti-phishing safeguards that Microsoft added to Internet Explorer 7 and other software.

Other users who have had the same problem report that removing and reinstalling Internet Explorer doesn't cure it, so it's probably not due to corruption of the web browser's files. If this happened fairly recently, the most effective fix is to use the Windows System Restore feature to go back to a state before the problem started.

Most likely, though, the problem is with an add-on module. To test this, you can start

Internet Explorer 7 without add-ons. There are several ways to do this.

First, if you have an Internet Explorer icon on the desktop, right-click on it. There may be a 'Start without add-ons' option. Alternatively, click on Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools and you should see an item called Internet Explorer (no add-ons). If not, click on Start, Run and type "C:\Program Files\Internet Explorer\iexplore.exe" -extoff. Then click OK. Either way, you should see an Internet Explorer screen saying the add-ons have been disabled. If the address bar now works normally, the problem is with one of those add-ons. To find out which one, close Internet Explorer and restart it normally, click on the Tools menu and choose Manage Add-Ons. Select the Enable or Disable Add-ons option.

Make sure you show all add-ons. The default action shows only the active add-ons, and this may miss the one causing the problem. We would suggest disabling different sets of these to see if it makes a difference.

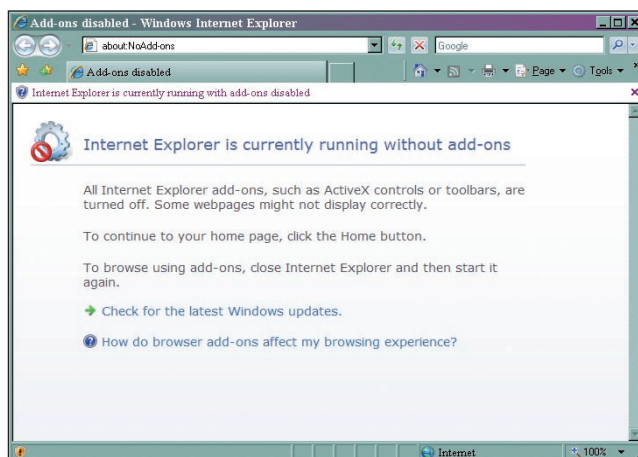
While you may not think that a firewall would mind whether the address had been typed in or entered from a list, there have been reports of your problem occurring when a set of motherboard utilities from Nvidia have been

installed. These include the Network Access Manager firewall. The problem occurs even if the Nvidia firewall is supposedly disabled. You will need to uninstall it to fix the problem and then check to see if there is an update that will help address the issue.

In other cases, this issue has been found to be caused by an interaction between Verclsid.exe, a new security feature introduced by Microsoft in April 2006, and certain third-party programs. This should have been fixed by a new version, which was released on 25th April 2006 in a revised version of security update 908531.

Verclsid.exe checks the validity of shell extensions (add-ons to Windows Explorer and Internet Explorer) before they run. It seems that some third-party software can block Verclsid.exe from running. Programs that are known to cause this include HP's Share to Web utility, Kerio Firewall and certain Nvidia graphics drivers. For more information, you should visit <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/918165>.

While these conflicts should have been cured by the update, it would not surprise us if you find a new conflict. If you still don't know the cause then we suggest going to www.mozilla.com and downloading a copy of Firefox.



◀ Running Internet Explorer without add-ons is a good way to troubleshoot any problems

What's wrong with Hibernate mode?

Q I recently installed Windows Vista Home Premium on my Packard Bell Easynote L4014, which has had its RAM upgraded from 256MB to 1.25GB. I have changed the options in Power Options so that if I briefly press the power button or close the lid it goes into Hibernate mode. Every time I close the lid or press the power button, or select Hibernate manually from the Start menu, it appears to go into Hibernate mode. However, when I come back 10 minutes later, I find it has crashed. What's going on?

This computer used to go into Hibernate mode flawlessly in Windows XP. Could there be a problem with the chipset or BIOS? I have the latest drivers for everything, but I am extremely reluctant to flash the BIOS in case it goes wrong and trashes the

motherboard. Is there anything that might be wrong with the chipset of my PC that is causing hibernation problems?

*D Johnson,
242johnson@frederickgoughschool.co.uk*

A We doubt it is a chipset fault as your computer has an Intel chipset. Besides which, Hibernate worked perfectly in Windows XP. The most common cause of a hibernation problem (either incomplete hibernation or failure to restart after hibernation) is a device driver issue. The initial Vista drivers may have bugs. Check for updated drivers at Windows Update. Select the Custom option and look in the hardware category.

Since this is such a standard Intel chipset, however, we doubt this is the problem. It is far more likely to be your hibernate file. When a

computer goes into Hibernate mode, Windows writes out all the contents of memory to the hibernate file. This means that the hibernate file needs to be a bit larger than the total amount of RAM in the computer.

Windows XP's hibernate file is called Hiberfil.sys and is a hidden system file in the root directory of the C: drive. Sometimes, however, the hibernate file does not increase in size when you add more memory.

Go to Control Panel and choose Power Options. Click on the Hibernation tab and you will see a tick box labelled Enable Hibernation. Clear this, and Windows will delete the hibernation file. Then click on Apply and run Defrag. When Defrag finishes, go back to Control Panel, Power Options and enable hibernation again. Windows should create a new file of the correct size. Then try hibernating again.

Connection problem with Belkin router

Q Before I relieve myself of £50 on a new router, I'd like to know if any of your readers have experienced problems with Belkin's F5D7630-4A router? It worked fine for four months, but suddenly I cannot get an internet connection. I've checked the settings and reloaded them, reset the router, updated the firmware and changed all my leads and cables.

I can get online fine with an ordinary modem, and when I spoke to my ISP it confirmed the router had tried to connect 18 times in 10 minutes, so it's constantly dropping in and out. Belkin says it's a line problem, but I would expect the other modem to give the same result. I saw on a website that a few people have experienced similar trouble. One guy took it apart and attached a fan, which solved the problem. It does get very hot, and if I leave it switched off for a couple of days I can turn it on and get a connection for two minutes. The ADSL light should be on all the time to show a line connection, but it flicks on and off.

Mark Chambers, mzchambers@uwclub.net

A Your ISP may possibly have made some changes to its equipment. Many have been switching customers to different equipment installed in exchanges as part of local loop unbundling. Some changes could affect the Belkin router but not your other modem. You should ask your ISP if there have been any changes and find out the make of the DSLAM equipment on your line. Then check with Belkin support for any firmware updates available, or details of any compatibility issues with that equipment.

The same router, with only cosmetic and firmware differences, is also marketed by 3Com and SMC. All get very hot, but some issues do appear to be firmware-related. For example, Belkin users have complained that the router will crash when running peer-to-peer applications with many connections.

It is also possible that there is a problem on your line, and perhaps your old modem is more tolerant of poor connections. There should be a way to get a diagnostic report from your old modem showing line conditions.



▲ The Belkin F5D7630-4A router can get very hot

However, this aside, we do agree with your conclusions that it is likely to be a heat-related failure. If the router is only four months old and still under warranty, you should be able to get a replacement. If not, improved cooling might be the answer.

Help needed with laptop fault dispute

Q I hope you can help me with a dispute I am having with Comet and Acer over a broken Aspire 3050 series notebook.

Disillusioned with buying expensive products over the web, I thought I would make life easier for myself and my mother by buying her a notebook from a well-known retailer, Comet. I figured if there were any problems, she could easily take it back to the store. She needed the notebook only for email, web browsing and so on, so I thought the cheapest one would suffice, despite its low specification. This new notebook cost £300.

We bought the notebook in December and then waited for my mother to get connected to broadband. This didn't happen until March. I connected the laptop and started downloading 69 Microsoft updates. This took ages, so I left it overnight to download, install and then power off. The next day I powered on, only to find that there were some dead pixels in the bottom right-hand corner and some discoloured horizontal and vertical lines. The black pixels then slowly expanded before my eyes until the whole corner was black and thus essentially dead.

On returning the system, Comet claimed that it was accidental damage – after asking us if we had bought accidental damage cover, which, of course, we hadn't. After writing to the chief executive of Comet we finally got the company, under the Sale of Goods Act, to investigate and prove accidental damage. The laptop was sent to Acer, who wrote a report with no information, just claiming it was a chargeable repair.

Interestingly, the laptop was returned with a new fault. The same thing had happened to the screen in the top right-hand corner as well as the original bottom corner.

I am convinced that there was no accidental damage and I feel one or other company should be responsible for a repair, refund or replacement. I am annoyed at how easily companies can forgo their responsibility by claiming something for which they have not indicated any proof.

Our next step is to take them to court, but I would like to understand a bit more about what can happen to laptop screens. First, Comet let on that once a fault starts it can cascade across the whole screen; can this happen if a single pixel is damaged? Second, what can cause this type of fault? Could it be proven beyond a doubt that there was accidental damage? Can the original fault be independently verified, and how do we go about this?

Finally, now that Comet has a get-out clause thanks to the report from Acer, who should we take to court? Both Acer and Comet have us over a barrel, so your help and advice would be much appreciated.

Craig Mee, *via email*

A This must be incredibly frustrating for you. An area of black pixels is normally caused by physical damage, resulting from some impact or pressure on the LCD panel, so we can see why Comet would claim this. Apparently, Acer agreed, as it said the repair was not covered by the warranty.

A single bad pixel would not spread in this way, so there must have been some pressure or bending force applied to the screen panel. We can only think there was a fault or distortion in

the notebook lid (perhaps caused by accidental damage) before you received the system; this put stress on the LCD panel and, over time, led to the failure. This may have happened in shipping from factory to the store, although usually shipping materials are adequate to protect against such damage.

If it had been unpacked and used as a display model before you received it, it is more likely that it was damaged at the store. Usually, however, it would not take so long before the damage became apparent. So it would be very difficult to prove that the physical damage occurred before you received the system.

Notebook computers are prone to accidental damage; their small size makes them inherently more fragile and they are always being moved around. We often see notebooks damaged when "the dog knocked it off the coffee table" (funny how it is always the dog that gets blamed). So we think accidental damage cover is very worthwhile and not usually all that expensive.

Unfortunately, Comet does not actually have to prove its opinion that it was accidental damage, and it is up to you to show on the balance of probabilities that it was due to a defect in the computer you bought. Given that accidental damage is the most common cause of this kind of defect, and that many owners have been known to lie to get warranty repairs done, it might be hard to convince a court that it was not accidental damage.

We can only suggest that you take the computer to an independent repairer to investigate it. There is then a chance that the repairer will be able to determine the nature of the fault that caused the LCD damage. Perhaps, for example, the screen assembly had been incorrectly put together so that a screw was pushing against the back of the panel.

Does Vista have a problem with LimeWire?

Q I recently bought a new computer with Windows Vista installed. I thought it was great until I installed LimeWire. I have tried two different versions, and the one I am currently using is LimeWire 4.13.4, which I managed to get on the internet.

Sometimes when I load LimeWire, the PC will just turn off or show the blue screen of death and shut down. What can I do? Is this some Vista security measure designed to block peer-to-peer networking?

Jason Mears, jason-mears@hotmail.com

A It's not that Vista has a problem with LimeWire, although many users think peer-to-peer (P2P) networks are so dangerous that Vista security ought to block them. We suspect that your computer came with a free trial of McAfee Internet

Security that Dell, HP and many other computer manufacturers have included lately. This is possibly because McAfee has been paying them to install it on every new computer.

First of all, you should never download any LimeWire 'updates' using the LimeWire P2P service, or from unknown websites, as they are probably infected with spyware. The latest release of LimeWire (as of 26th June 2007) is 4.12.14. If you have downloaded something that claims to be a later release, it probably contains spyware. The safest place to get LimeWire is the official website at www.limewire.com. Check this site for the latest version.

The current version of LimeWire is compatible with Windows Vista, provided you are running the correct release of Java. You should remove your current version and replace it with the official download. You can download the latest version of Java (currently 6.0 update 1) for free

at www.java.com. Some users have found that LimeWire runs better if they right-click on the program, select Properties, click on the Compatibility tab and then select 'Run in compatibility mode as Windows XP SP2'.

Many new computers come with a trial version of McAfee Internet Security. In our opinion this software is of little use, will slow down your computer and should be uninstalled. In addition, early Windows Vista versions of the McAfee firewall have a bug that shuts down all internet activity when you run LimeWire or other P2P networking software. If this problem occurs, try uninstalling the McAfee firewall and use the one built into Vista.

Finally, be very careful about what you download from any P2P network. You have no idea where the files really come from. They may have been deliberately infected by spyware or viruses.

Self-built PC won't boot

Q I built two of my previous computers with no problems at all and as they have now become dinosaurs I recently decided to build another one. I chose to build my first Pentium computer using a computer upgrade bundle comprising an ECS 662/1066T M2 1.0 motherboard with onboard VGA, audio and LAN, 1GB of DDR2 667MHz memory and a 3.20GHz LGA775 Intel Pentium D processor. I fitted all of this into a new midi case.

The problem is that when the computer is turned on, the only sign of life is from the LAN port light on the back of the case. I have checked and double-checked all the connections but unfortunately I am getting absolutely nowhere.

As mentioned above, there is a VGA port on this motherboard and I understand this motherboard comes with built-in graphics, so I have not installed a graphics card. Do you think that this would stop the computer from powering up? If not, can you please shed some light on what you think the problem could be?

Peter Living, peter.living@virgin.net

A This board has graphics built in. Even if there were no video adaptor present, the system would beep, the fans would run and there would generally be some signs of life.

Start by rechecking all the jumpers on the motherboard. In particular, check the position of the Clear CMOS jumper, which is circled on the motherboard photo, right. With the board mounted in a tower case, and the keyboard connector at the top left, this will be on the bottom edge, about an inch (25mm) in from the right-hand corner. It is a three-pin jumper and connecting pins 1 and 2 clears the CMOS, while 2 and 3 is for normal operation.

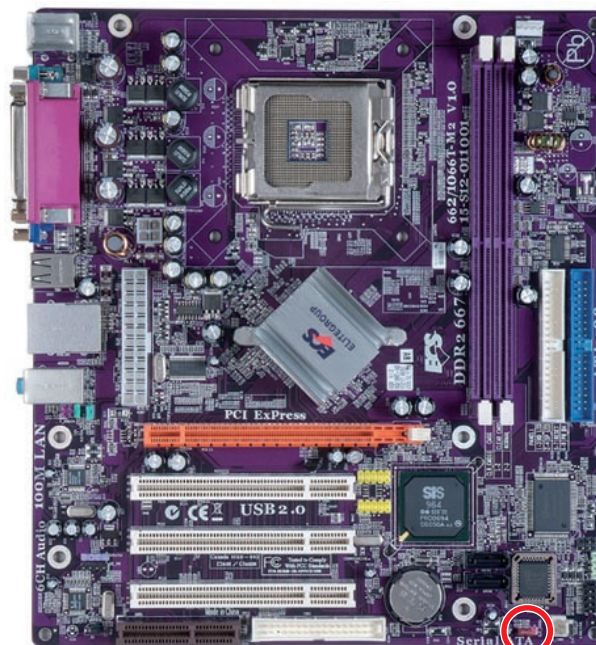
Many motherboards are shipped with this jumper in the Clear position to conserve the

battery and the system often won't boot until the jumper is in the Normal position. Confusingly, the pins are numbered from right to left, so pins 1 and 2 (Clear) are to the right, and you'll need to move the jumper to the left (position 2 and 3) for normal operation.

If the CMOS jumper is in the Normal position, the CMOS memory may well have become corrupt. Disconnect the system from the power and move the jumper to the Clear CMOS position (pins 1 and 2) for a minute or so. Return it to Normal (pins 2 and 3) before trying to start the computer.

This motherboard can be used with a 20- or 24-pin power supply connector, although we would strongly recommend using a 24-pin supply. If you use a supply with a 20-pin connector, be very careful to plug it in to the correct holes. The latch on the power connector won't line up with the latch part on the socket. With the latch facing you, the plug should be to the left end of the socket.

Another common error is to connect the power button to the wrong pins. There is a connecting block with nine pins, five in one row and four in the other. The power button connects to two pins in the shorter row, next to the missing pin position. You can also test a motherboard without even connecting the power button; just use the tip of a screwdriver to short these pins together for a second or so. Then, as you break the contact, the motherboard should power on. Make sure that the processor is properly seated and that it has been inserted the right way round; the corner with a triangle indicates pin 1.



▲ Ensure the CMOS jumper (circled) is in the Normal position

Sometimes it is best to take the motherboard out of the case, just to make sure nothing is shorting out. Test with the bare minimum of items connected. For example, a bad modem could prevent the board booting. Don't connect any drives or use any add-on cards, or even connect USB cables, until you have got it booting. Just connect one memory module, the monitor and a keyboard. Make sure the processor fan is connected, though. The PC will boot without it, but only for a very brief time before the processor dies.

If the board still won't boot, you probably have faulty hardware. Without spare parts to swap out, it is difficult to determine whether it is the power supply, motherboard or processor that is to blame. Hopefully, you bought it all from the same supplier.

Windows Update keeps rebooting my computer

Q Windows Update keeps rebooting my computer, often closing applications without saving the files I was working on. I have it set to download updates automatically, but when it has finished it sometimes needs to restart the computer. Instead of telling me it needs to restart and waiting until I am ready, it starts a countdown and, unless I tell it to wait, it reboots without closing down applications. Is there any way to stop this behaviour short of turning off Automatic Updates altogether?

Jack Jeffs, via email

A Yes, Automatic Updates will reboot the computer without saving files. This annoyed us, too, until we found the answer. The solution was buried deep inside a Microsoft white paper intended for corporate IT administrators and cunningly labelled as being for Windows Server.

The problem happens only if you select the 'Automatically download recommended updates for my computer and install them on a schedule' option. Microsoft says it is expected behaviour; it happens only when one of the updates installed needs a restart before it can complete installation. By default, Automatic Update will choose to install updates at 3am, when the computer is unlikely to be in use, but if the computer was off at that time or power-saving settings caused it to hibernate, updates may take place when the computer is next switched on.

When it finds a reboot is needed, it gives the user a five-minute warning. You can tell it not to reboot, but that warning just pops back up five minutes later. This repeats, until eventually it happens when you are away from the PC. When you return, you'll find your computer has just rebooted and lost the work you had open.

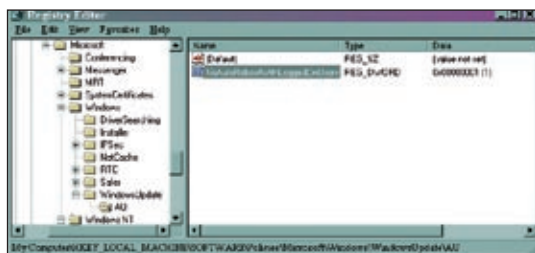
First, it's worth checking the Automatic Update settings. Right-click on My Computer, select Properties and then click the Automatic Updates tab.

The default time of 3am works well for some people, but if you have a notebook computer and use Hibernate, or if for some other reason updates could not be installed at that time, the updates will take place the next day.

Automatic Updates is controlled by Registry entries. Many of these are documented in a document for corporate IT staff called Software Update Services Deployment White Paper, which can be downloaded from www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem/sus/susdeployment.mspx.

To prevent Automatic Updates restarting a computer while users are logged on, you need to use the Registry Editor. It is always wise to create a system restore point before editing the Registry. Click Start, Run, type Regedit and click OK. Then navigate through the Registry to HKey_Local_Machine\Software\Policies\Microsoft\Windows. Here you will see a number of folders, called keys, in the left window. You may or may not have one called WindowsUpdate. If not, right-click in the right-hand window and choose New, Key. Type in the name WindowsUpdate (with no space). Do the same again, and create a key beneath it called AU. In the AU folder, right-click and choose New, Dword value. Then name it NoAutoRebootWithLoggedOnUsers. Click on this new value and enter a value of 1. When it is complete, it should look like the screenshot shown below.

If Windows Update has already started installing updates, this will not take effect until next time. Once complete, Windows will still tell you that the updates installed require a restart but then, instead of providing a countdown, it will wait until you are ready to reboot.



▲ You can stop Automatic Updates from rebooting your computer automatically

Installing USB network adaptor on Windows 98

Q I just bought a USB2 Ethernet adaptor with drivers on a CD. I want to link a PC running Windows 98 SE to my home network, but during installation I was asked to insert the Windows 98 SE CD-ROM, which I do not have. Do I have to have this CD, or is there something else that I can do to complete the installation?

If I must have the CD, where can I buy one? I am a novice on PCs, so I would appreciate your help.

Bernard McMillan, via email

A Windows 98 is a little bit annoying because every time you change any part of the network configuration it insists on copying all the Windows Networking components again. If you know that you have already got the file it is asking for (and this is likely if your computer already had a networking device such as an Ethernet port installed), you can choose to skip that file, but this will get tedious when it is repeated for many files.

Fortunately, most Windows 98 computers from major manufacturers such as Dell, Compaq and so on have all these installation files pre-copied to the hard disk. If this is the case, all you have to do is tell Windows the folder name where they are stored.

The most common locations are C:\Windows\Options\Cabs or simply C:\Win98, although the person who installed the system is free to call the folder anything they want. The folder on your computer will have a large number of CAB files in it.

If you cannot find such a folder on your computer, and some networking components are not installed, you will need to get hold of a Windows 98 CD. These have not been available as new for quite some time, but used ones should not be too hard to acquire nowadays, as most Windows 98 systems are being discarded.

Removing Adobe Reader 7.0.7

Q I am running Windows XP Home Edition with Service Pack 2 and I am trying to update Adobe Reader 7.0.7. When I try to remove it using Control Panel's Add/Remove Programs, I get this error message: "This patch pack could not be opened. Verify that the patch pack exists and that you can access it, or contact the applicator vendor to verify that this is a valid Windows installer patch package."

As I have no idea what a patch package is, I do not know how to proceed.

Alan Southern, gasouthern@tiscali.co.uk

A The version number 7.0.7 indicates that Acrobat has installed various patches to the original 7.0.0 version.

The error indicates that some of the patch installation information is missing, which is why Add/Remove Programs can't figure out how to remove it.

The problem is in the database that Windows Installer maintains. This kind of problem is so common that Microsoft has written a special utility to fix it. You should download the Windows Installer CleanUp Utility from [http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?kbid=](http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?kbid=290301)

290301. Once it is installed, you should use this utility to select all the various updates to Acrobat Reader and remove them. Hopefully, that will then allow you to reinstall Acrobat Reader 8.0.

If that doesn't work, it is sometimes necessary to remove Adobe Reader manually. For lengthy instructions on how to remove any version of Adobe Reader manually, you need to visit www.adobe.com and then search for "manually remove adobe reader". To remove Adobe Reader 7, you can also just search for kb400728. ☞